Appendix A

List of Interviewees

People Interviewed for the Arizona Charter School Progress Evaluation

Name	Position	Organization
Jemeille Ackourey	Vice President, Club Operations	Boys and Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Phoenix
Kristi Bradford	Senion Librarian, Children's Services	Tucson-Pima Public Library
Jeff Andresen	Director	YMCA - Downtown Branch
Paul Elsner	Chancellor	Maricopa Community College District
Carol Fitch	Supervisor, Children & Young Adult Section	Phoenix Public Library
Jeffry Flake	Director	Goldwater Institute
Jeff Groscost	Senator	Arizona State Senate
Alfredo Gutierrez	Principal	Gutierrez & Jamison
Mary Hartley	Senator	Arizona State Senate
Marilyn Henley	Educational Consultant	Educational Cyberconnections, Inc.
Tim Hogan	Executive Director	Center for Law in the Public Interest
John Huppenthal	Senator	Arizona State Senate
Jerri Katzerman	Staff Attorney	Arizona Center for Disability Law
Ted Koulderie	Policy Analyst	Center for Policy Studies
Dale Larsen	Assistant Director	City of Phoenix Parks, Recreation & Libraries
Elaine Myers	Supervisor, Youth Programs	Phoenix Public Library
Tom Patterson	Senator	Arizona State Senate
Marion Pickens	Representative	Arizona House of Representatives
Tom Pickrell	Director of Legal Services	Arizona School Boards Association
Eric Premack	Director, Charter School Development Center Project	Institute for Education reform at California State University, Sacramento
Jon Schroeder	Director	Charter Friends National Network
Judy Sebastian	Program Director	Arizona Education Association
Tom Simplot	Deputy Director	Homebuilders Association of Central Arizona

Appendix B

Surveys

Appendix C

Focus Group Protocols

Appendix D

Interview Protocols

Appendix E

Definitions– Parental Concern Categories

Categories Developed for Analysis of Parental Complaint Files

Definitions

Academics: Concerns relating to student achievement, curriculum, educational materials, or education program at the school.

Communications/Expectations: Concerns relating to 1) miscommunication (whether described as intentional or unintentional) on the part of the school or parent or related to the school or parent; 2) parent's or school's expectations of the other (whether stated, unstated, or implied); or claims of lack of responsiveness to parents concerns on part of school.

Discipline: Concerns relating to the specific nature of a student disciplinary method administered by staff or administration.

Extremism: Concerns relating to school personnel or school practices that convey an extreme, religious, or odd ideology.

General accountability: Concerns relating to accountability of the particular school or charter movement overall.

Health: Concerns regarding school health and hygiene of the school environment.

Inter-agency Issues: Concerns relating to problems between government or private entities working together, including records, students, and credit transfer problems.

***Legal intervention*:** Concerns relating to the escalation of events or problems involving school and parent that results in police intervention or further legal proceedings.

Money/business practices: Concerns relating to fees or tuition charged to parents, possible financial malfeasance or incompetence, financial conflicts of interest, and administration/staff use of school funds.

Policy: Concerns relating to the existence or implementation of school policies regarding discipline, personnel, operating procedures, student safety procedures, transportation, supervision of students, or practicing within the parameters of the school's charter.

Public School Practice: Concerns relating to standard practices used in public schools, whether in statute or accepted practice, claims of civil rights violations or exclusionary practices.

Safety: Concerns relating to the safety of students at the school, prevention of violence against students or staff.

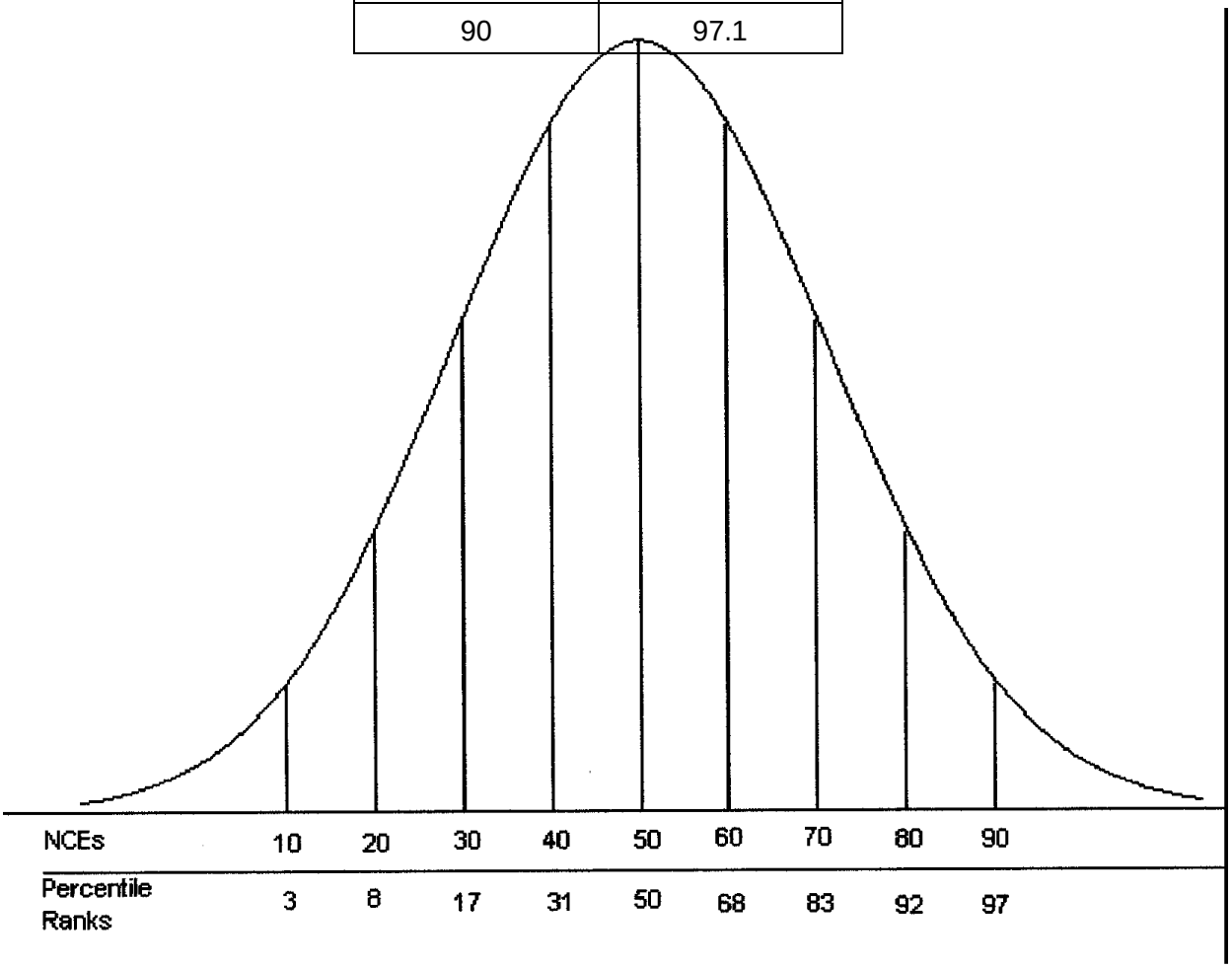
Special education: Concerns relating to any aspect of special education–the identification, administration, review, or adherence to student individual education plans, or any of the regulations surrounding special education at the school.

Staff/administration/governance issues: Concerns relating to professional conduct, treatment of students, parents, teachers or volatile relationships, abrupt or upsetting teacher dismissals, concerns about staff qualifications or performance, adequacy of staffing, high staff turnover, school's inflexibility or lack of recourse on issues.

Appendix F

Normal Curve Equivalent– Conversion Table

NCE	Percentile Rank
10	2.9
20	7.7
30	17
40	31
50	50
60	68
70	83
80	92.3
90	97.1



The shape above is a so-called "Normal" or "Bell" curve that represents the shape of the frequency of SAT-9 scores. As the reader can see, the NCE scores are distributed equally along the horizontal axis that reflects achievement. Percentile Ranks are not distributed equally. It is important to notice that gaining 10 NCE points at the bottom of the distribution (say from 20 to 30) is matched with a change of 11 percentile ranks. However, moving from 40 to 50 NCEs is matched with an increase of 19 percentile ranks. It is for this reason that NCEs are not directly translatable into percentile ranks,

and should not be considered to be equivalent. An important implication of this scaling is that is is easier to move 5 percentile ranks in the middle of distribution that in the ends.

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Exhibit A:

Arizona Charter School Profiles

March 1999

Charter School Profiles

As specified in the Project Proposal Request for the Arizona Charter School Progress Evaluation, Morrison Institute researchers developed descriptive profiles of each charter school in the study. Because 30% of the sample are multi-site charters (*i.e.*, charter holder operating schools at more than one site), the 80 separate charters in the sample represent 147 individual charter school sites.

The profiles include information required by the Project Proposal Request, such as the chartering body, grade levels served, curriculum focus or learning philosophy, and qualifications of instructional staff. Many additional characteristics are also included as Morrison Institute staff believe they compliment the required information and add value to the profiles.

The information included in the profiles was obtained from documents and databases at the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), the ADE charter school office, and the state-level sponsoring boards. Other information was obtained through evaluation activities. Both types of sources are listed below.

- The ADE School Report Card database
- The October 1, 1997 school enrollment report
- Charter school applications
- Surveys sent to the charter school directors

Some of the data included in the profiles are not available at every site. For example, a few items on the Report Card Database were not complete at the site level. In these instances, the data field appears blank on the school profile. It is also the case that a few of the sources used were not complete for all schools. For example, the charter school applications were used to obtain information about teacher qualifications. However, some applications did not address this topic. In these instances, the data were "not available" from the source used and are described in the profiles in this way.

In order for the profiles to be a useful tool, the incomplete data sources need to be corrected, and of course, the profiles need to be expanded to every charter school in the state. However, the profiles of the schools in the Arizona Charter School Progress Evaluation shown here demonstrate how such school specific information could be used as a resource for comparative information by parents considering charter schools for their children. The profiles could also serve as a quick reference by ADE and the sponsoring boards as well.

Before turning to the profiles themselves, the tables and graphs below show summary information for various elements of the profiles at the 147 charter school sites.

Summary Data from the Charter School Profiles

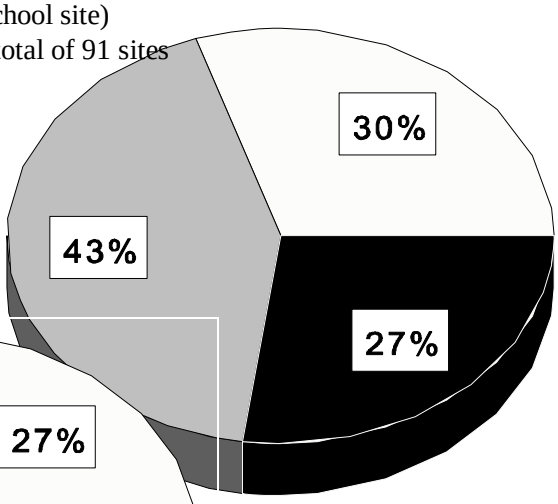
Charter school sample size

80 charter schools (i.e., individual charters held)

56 (70%) are single charters (operate only one school site)
24 (30%) are multi-site charters ➔ represent a total of 91 sites

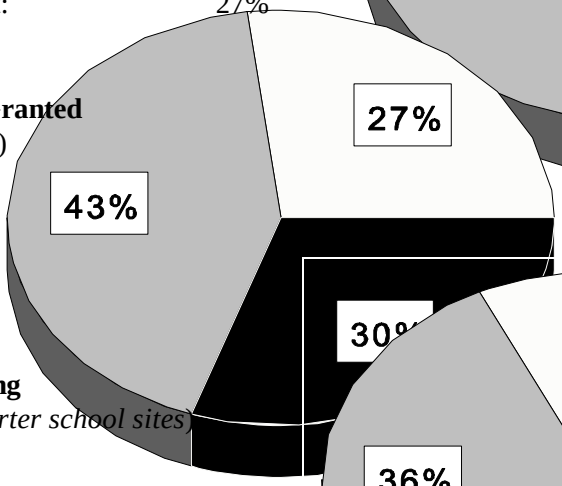
Sponsoring Body
(*of charters held*)

State Board of Education (SBE): 30%
Charter School Board (CSB): 43%
A School District: 27%



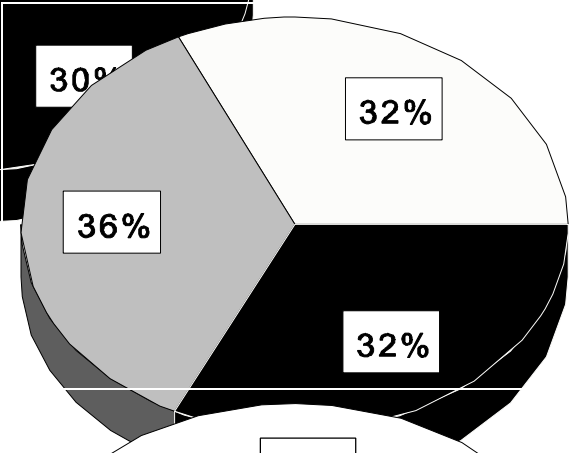
Year Charter was Granted
(*of charters held*)

1995: 27%
1996: 43%
1997: 30%



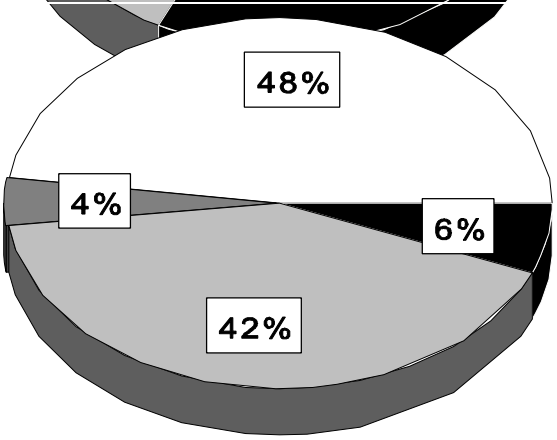
Year Began operating
(*includes all charter school sites*)

1995: 32%
1996: 36%
1997: 32%



Origin of school
(*includes all charter school sites*)

New Charters (start up): 48%
Conversions (from existing): 52%
Conversions from public schools: 4%
Conversions from private schools: 42%
Conversions from reservation schools: 6%



Plans to expand in 1998/99:

School sites with waiting lists: 41 (28%)
Charter schools with parent volunteer requirements: 28 (19%)
Charter schools that administered a parent satisfaction survey in 1997/98: 58 (39%)

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Exhibit B:

Analysis of Accountability Policies

March 1999

Charter School Accountability Policies

Morrison Institute researchers examined actual policies holding charter school administrators, teachers, parents, and students accountable for student achievement. An *a priori* assumption was that an analysis of charter school applications would yield sufficient information about these policies. However, specificity of information pertaining to accountability policies varied widely among charter school applicants. Yet no other more appropriate source for this information could be identified.

For purposes of analyzing charter application language regarding accountability, three basic components of accountability were identified: 1) the clarity and measurability of goals related to student achievement; 2) planned measurement of those goals and how specifically measures or assessments are related to stated goals; 3) consequences for results–either positive or negative.

Each of the charter applications for the 82 charter schools originally in the study sample was reviewed for this information and results were aggregated. This research included an analysis of the range of possible combinations, taking into account the year schools were chartered, and whether schools were sponsored by a district or a state-level board. A summary of findings follows.

Goals

- Regardless of year sponsored or type of sponsor, half of the charter applications reviewed contained achievement related goals that were both clearly stated and measurable.

- Another 40% contained student achievement related goals, but some of the goals were either not clearly stated or not measurable, or both.

- The remaining 10% of applications did not
- *Parents*—11% of the applications containing language about consequences described parents and their role in ensuring their child's achievement that was more specific than a volunteering requirement at the school.

address goals related to student achievement.
Alignment of student achievement with assessments

- Almost half (46%) of the applications reviewed clearly aligned specific academic achievement goals with specific assessment methods.

- Another 40% of applications described assessments which were generally aligned with assessments, but how they were aligned was not shown, rather it was assumed or implied.

- The final 14% either did not mention assessment in the context of measuring student achievement progress (5%) or did not mention assessment information at all (9%).

Consequences for achievement results

- Only 23% of the applications described some sort of consequences for meeting or not meeting student achievement goals. Those that did, described consequences for the following stakeholders. Percentages shown below are based upon those applications (23% of total) that had language about consequences.

- *Administrators*—11% of the applications containing any kind of language about consequences described a consequence for administrators.

- *Teachers*—26% of the applications contained some reference to consequences for teachers. Some referred to a merit system for demonstrating progress toward achievement goals. More often it referred to the use of student performance data in the context of performance reviews or evaluations.

- *Students*—79% of the applications containing language about consequences described consequences for students. Most frequently, this came in the form of direct discussion of progress levels required to pass to the next grade level.

The results of this analysis are interesting. First, the level of specificity of language related to accountability is lower than what would be expected based upon the ways in which charter schools are discussed and the principles under which they are described as operating.

From the introduction of charter schools in Minnesota in 1991, a basic tenet of the charter idea has been the notion that charter schools will be accountable for results. The idea is that good charter schools (those schools that greatly improve performance or maintain high student performance) will remain in business. Those schools that fail on achievement grounds will be closed by sponsors (or by market forces). A related assumption about charter schools is that the charter agreement (or in Arizona the charter application) will describe the program and results to be obtained and the measurement of these goals. Without specific language about achievement goals and how they will be measured, there is little information to determine if adequate progress is occurring.

The fact that charter schools have unique missions and often serve distinct populations, such as previously unsuccessful students, makes the issue of specificity even more important. There is certainly more than one way to assess student progress, and many charters use multiple means of determining progress. However, the absence of specific goals makes it difficult to know exactly what the expectations for improvement are.

It is important to note that this analysis is not meant as a criticism of the accountability-related efforts being made by charter applicants or the sponsors. To blame the schools for lack of specificity about achievement goals, measurement, and consequences in their applications is not warranted. They respond with applications that contain the details requested of them. Likewise, the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) charter school office and the state-level sponsors have developed supporting materials for applicants, such as *The Arizona Charter Schools Handbook*, available from ADE. This thick volume contains a wealth of information, including some guidance about setting specific and measurable goals. **However, some charter applicants may need more direct assistance in writing clear achievement-related goals and specifying the direct measurement of these goals.**

The sponsoring boards certainly receive some necessary information about progress in their schools' annual reports. Over time, goals may be clarified and progress mapped. However, **the accountability process can be streamlined by initially ensuring a clear focus on accountability in the charter application.** This notion is supported by strong agreement among stakeholders in this study that the correct place to focus on accountability is in the application process.

Stakeholders also noted concern about the role of district sponsors in accountability. Clearly some of the applications we reviewed from district sponsors had few details. In a few instances, they were nothing more than contracts. Working against accountability for these schools, is a part of the charter school law that guarantees districts immunity from the operations of the schools they sponsor. This is one aspect of the law that the Governor's Office, ADE, the Charter School Board, and the State Board of Education will attempt to change in the current legislative session. **Changing the charter school law's immunity provision for school district sponsors would bolster accountability for district sponsored schools.**

It is important to note that Arizona is not alone in the effort to fine tune accountability. This issue has been noted as difficult for most charter school states and has been acknowledged as such by national proponents of charter schools. States are hungry for accountability models that work well, and there are very few of them, but progress is being made with time and effort. For example, Massachusetts has a very strong accountability plan in place that works well for their schools, and many states look to Massachusetts as an example of a model in their own efforts to improve the charter school accountability system.

Addressing accountability will be no easier for Arizona than any other state, but it is important to deal with the issue now, as charter schools are continuing to be formed, and the task of accountability grows with each charter approved.

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Exhibit C:
A Benchmarking Model for Arizona Charter Schools

March 1999

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to present a benchmarking model that can be implemented with charter schools in Arizona. This first section presents a brief history of benchmarking and its application to the private and public sectors. It also discusses the benefits of benchmarking and provides an overview of the benchmarking process. The second section discusses the rationale for benchmarking and its merits for Arizona charter schools. It concludes by outlining a benchmarking system for charter schools and suggesting an implementation plan.

BENCHMARKING— A BRIEF HISTORY

The terms "benchmarks" and "benchmarking" are often used in discussions of organizational improvement. What do these words mean and how did they become a part of our vernacular?

The concept of benchmarks was first associated with land surveying. A benchmark was defined as a surveyor's mark made on a stationary object with a previously determined position—perhaps a building, street, rock, or other notable landmark—that could be used as a reference point for determining a new position or elevation. "In the most general terms, a benchmark was originally a sighting point from which measurements could be made or a standard against which others could be measured" (C. Bogan & M. English, 1994).

Benchmarking in the Private Sector

The benchmarking concept was imported into the business world in the 1970s, where it came to represent a measurement process for making company comparisons. David Kearns, former CEO of Xerox Corporation was an early advocate of the process and referred to it as "…the continuous process of measuring products, services, and practices against the toughest competitors or those companies recognized as industry leaders."

Xerox is often credited with making benchmarking a strategic management practice. This came about in the late 1970s when Xerox found itself losing photocopier market share to Japanese companies that sold their units for less than Xerox's manufacturing cost. Xerox responded with an in-depth analysis of its production efficiencies, and the implementation of a benchmarking system to control future costs. The result was a strong comeback for the company, and a popular success story that has earned Xerox a place in subsequent management texts and treatments of benchmarking.

Definitions of Benchmarking

The benchmarking process has been defined in various ways but current definitions consistently incorporate the ultimate goal—best practice and continuous improvement. A few examples follow:

"…the process of continuously comparing and measuring an organization against business leaders anywhere in the world to gain information that will help an organization improve its performance"

American Productivity and Quality Center, Weisendanger, 1993

"Benchmarking is the continuous process of measuring products, services, and practices against leaders, allowing the identification of best practices which will lead to sustained and superior performance"

J. R. Bullivant, 1994

"... a process for rigorously measuring your performance versus the best-in-class companies and for using the analysis to meet and surpass the best-in-class"

Kaiser Associates, *management consultants and*

benchmarking advocates

Companies have always compared their practices with competitors in their own industry. As benchmarking has evolved, however, business leaders have come to realize that they might benefit from looking at world leaders in other industries whose techniques might improve their own productivity. Xerox, for example, learned how to improve its warehouse operations from catalogue merchant LL Bean, the leader in the mail order business.

Over the last two decades, benchmarking's use has continued to grow. The list of companies involved in benchmarking projects includes AT&T, Boeing, Digital Equipment Corporation, DuPont, General Electric, Hewlett-Packard, Hughes Aircraft, John Deere, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble, Ritz-Carlton hotels, 3M, and Texas Instruments. Indeed, benchmarking is now so commonly associated with high performing companies that it has even been incorporated into the application guidelines for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. To be considered for an award, applicants must describe how they decided upon and used competitive comparisons and benchmarking data to improve performance and set future targets, and they must describe the procedures they use to improve the process for selecting benchmark data (Keehley, Medlin, MacBride, & Longmire, 1997).

Benchmarking in the Public Sector

Competitive forces and increasing globalization led to the use of benchmarking in the private sector. But in the public realm, where competition is not a factor, why would it be needed?

Benchmarking advocates feel that government should operate more like business by making efficiency a top priority. As expressed by Keehley, Medlin, MacBride, and Longmire, the drive to "... make government more efficient and effective is necessary because governments at all levels have not kept up with evolving management practices. Falling behind has led to wasted resources, a frustrated citizenry unable to get high-quality service, and agencies unprepared to measure and manage their affairs in a businesslike manner" (p.4). In looking to big business, public administrators see that benchmarking holds promise for positive change.

Benchmarking began a slow migration to the public sector in the late 1980s. In the last decade it has spread at all levels. Federal agencies that currently employ benchmarking include the US Postal Service, the IRS, and the departments of Defense and Energy. (The latter agency provides an extensive benchmarking web site.) State agencies that have implemented benchmarking include the New Jersey court system and the state government operations for Oregon and West Virginia. Several cities have also used benchmarking to improve services, including Salt Lake City, Dallas, and Madison, Wisconsin. In Arizona, the city of Phoenix Neighborhood Services Division holds a benchmarking system developed for it in 1996 by the Morrison Institute.

The Benefits of Benchmarking

Some compelling reasons support the use of benchmarking as a tool for program improvement. In the book, *High Performance Benchmarking: 20 Steps to Success*, authors H.J. Harrington and J.S. Harrington offer the following list of benefits:

Benchmarking will…

- help the organization learn from the experiences of others—no organization has the time or the resources to make all the mistakes itself.
- show the organization how it is performing in comparison to the best.
- identify the organization's weaknesses and strengths.
- help the organization prioritize its improvement activities.
- provide the organization with proven corrective action plans.

All of the above are important motivations for engaging in a benchmarking process. Nevertheless, despite its benefits and popularity, benchmarking is beset by a great deal of confusion regarding what it is and what it is not. The comparison below should help clarify this issue.

Benchmarking is:	**Benchmarking is not:**
comparing an organization and its parts with the best organizations, regardless of industry	a simple comparative study
comparing specific business processes with the best similar processes in any other industries to define best value	copying practices from other organizations
comparing an organization's products and services with those of the best competitors	a one-time performance assessment
comparing different types of equipment to select the best value for the specific application	static-benchmarks may change over time
implementing defined best practices	
projecting future trends in best practices and proactively reacting to trends	
meeting and exceeding customer expectations	
(Adapted from H. J. Harrington & J. S. Harrington)	(Adapted from Keehley et al., p.41)

The Benchmarking Process

Many possible variations of benchmarking exist, but John Bullivant, a Welsh health official and benchmarking expert, clearly outlines the benchmarking process in *Benchmarking for Continuous Improvement in the Public Sector*. According to Bullivant, the process can be thought of as comprising three distinct stages: planning, analysis, and action. Each stage, in turn, involves four steps. The outline shown below is adapted from Bullivant's work (p. 52):

Planning:

1. Select the subject area to benchmark
2. Define process, service, or product to benchmark
3. Identify potential benchmarking partners to find best practice
4. Identify data required to make comparisons

Analysis:

5. Collect the data and select benchmark partners
6. Determine the performance gap compared to benchmark
7. Establish differences in process
8. Target future performance

Action:

9. Communicate and commit to continuous improvement process
10. Adjust targets and develop corrective improvement plan
11. Implement
12. Review progress and recalibrate benchmarks

The first stage of the benchmarking process—deciding what to benchmark—is the most important, but also the most difficult. Every benchmark involves multiple layers or levels of specificity, from the most general (domain or broad area of interest) to the most specific (the goal performance level on a particular performance measure).

BENCHMARKING CHARTER SCHOOLS

Benchmarking can be effectively applied to Arizona's charter schools. In fact, a charter school benchmarking system makes sense for a number of important reasons. These include:

• Benchmarking provides accountability

A good benchmarking system offers the State Board of Education and State Board for Charter Schools (and sponsoring districts) a viable means for holding charter schools to high standards. The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) can help charter schools and the boards and districts that govern them by developing and implementing benchmarks. Benchmarking also promotes continuous improvement activity because charter sponsors and schools can add their own goals and monitor progress toward meeting them.

• Benchmarking allows charter schools to establish goals that are appropriate for their individual programs and populations

Charter schools usually have distinctive missions, programs, and goals, and they often serve discrete populations, such as students who have previously failed. A benchmarking system would allow these charters to establish benchmarks appropriate to their individual characteristics, while still employing a set of indicators and performance measures common with all other charters. In this way, charter schools can maintain their individuality, yet still compare themselves to their peers.

• Benchmarking promotes efficiency in learning best practices

The tradeoff for decentralized educational institutions is a loss in efficiency because small organizations do not benefit from economies of scale. Charter schools, for example, cannot provide specialized departments for such functions as business operations, research, or evaluation. This lack of specialization and expertise can cost a school dearly in terms of mistakes, time, and energy, but with the support of an organized benchmarking system charter schools would be less likely to waste time duplicating the efforts of their counterparts because they would be assisted in the search for best practices.

What to Benchmark?

During the past year, Morrison Institute staff have spoken with a wide range of individuals and organizations who work with charter schools, including charter school directors and parents. Based upon this research, as well as an extensive review of the literature, major goals have been identified upon which a charter school benchmarking system should be based.

Research, however, suggests that benchmarking is most successful when the development process engages stakeholders, because key leaders must "buy in" to the process for it to be successful. Therefore, while this section presents a workable charter school benchmarking system, *it should be viewed as a point of departure for a benchmarking effort by those individuals who, ultimately, will be responsible for its implementation and use.* Participants may want to add appropriate goals and indicators to increase the value of the benchmarking system.

Three broad domains form a foundation upon which to build a charter school benchmarking system: students, parents, and school operations. Each domain requires goal statements and correlated indicators.

DOMAIN: STUDENTS

Goals	Indicators
Charter schools will improve students' academic achievement	1. Stanford 9 scores 2. AIMS scores 3. Student products that demonstrate acquisition of standards
Students will take responsibility for their own educations and prepare for the future	1. Attendance rate 2. Behavioral/disciplinary referrals/actions 3. Graduation rate 4. Dropout rate 5. Enrollment in post-secondary education or work
Students will have positive educational experiences	1. Survey of student satisfaction

DOMAIN: PARENTS

Goals	Indicators
Parents will participate in school activities in a variety of ways	1. Parent involvement instrument
Parents will support their child's education at home	1. Parent participation in school-home conferences 2. Parent involvement in education at home instrument
Parents will be satisfied with their charter school	1. Parent satisfaction survey 2. Student mobility - transfers in/out 3. Waiting list for admissions

DOMAIN: SCHOOL OPERATIONS

Goals	Indicators
Teachers will find teaching in their charter school satisfying	1. Teacher satisfaction survey 2. Staff turnover 3. Applications for employment
Charter schools will provide a safe environment for students and staff	1. Police interventions - report card
Conflicts will be resolved without resorting to litigious measures	1. School-related events resulting in litigation
Charter schools will operate in full compliance with:	
– special education requirements	1. Non-compliance with special education laws documented by ADE

– sound fiscal management principles (or in accordance with the USFR-CR, if not exempt)	2. Results of annual fiscal audits
– required ADE reporting requirements in a timely manner	3. Timely submission of all required reports

Once goals and indicators are agreed upon by a consensus of key stakeholders, more specific measures of performance and actual benchmarks (i.e., goal-level measures of performance) can be determined.

The following example illustrates how the benchmarking model might look as applied to charter schools for the goal related to improved academic performance in the student domain.

Sample Benchmark for Student Achievement

Domain (Broad area of interest)	Students		
Goals regarding students	• Improve students' academic achievement	• Improved student responsibility for education and future	• Positive educational experiences
Indicators for improved student achievement	• Stanford 9 scores • AIMS scores • Student products that demonstrate acquisition of state standards		
Measures of Performance (example)	• Gain in standard score from one year to the next as a percentage of the state average gain in standard score		
Benchmarks (examples)	• By 2001, charter school students' achievement gains will be 105% of the state average. • By 2003, charter school students' achievement gains will be 110% of the state average. • By 2005, charter school students' achievement gains will be 115% of the state average.		

As a companion to the benchmarking system, descriptive profiles should be prepared for each charter school to provide information about the school's local context including demographic information. These profiles will help interpret differences that occur among charter schools in their performance on selected benchmarks.

PROFILE OF SCHOOL CONTEXT/DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

1. Student enrollment
2. Grade levels served
3. Program emphasis
4. Target population
5. Race/ethnicity of students
6. Limited English Proficiency
7. Free/reduced price lunch program eligibility
8. Prior learning environment for newly admitted students

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This section suggests a process for implementing an "Arizona Charter Schools Benchmarking System." The implementation plan would start with a small cadre of charter schools that would serve two purposes: (1) they would help design the benchmarking system from the bottom up, and (2) they would provide a "field check" for the plan to help in refining it and to ensure that proposed performance indicators and measures are both collectible and meaningful.

Phase I: Selection of Schools for Participation

A Request for Proposals (RFP) and a letter should be sent to all charter school directors soliciting their applications for participation in the development and implementation of the Arizona Charter School Benchmarking System. The RFP should also promise a stipend to the schools selected to help defray costs incurred by their participation (for travel, planning time, extra data collection, researching of best practices, etc.). Five schools should be selected through a competitive process based on pre-established criteria that includes the following:

Diversity: Selected schools should vary in their missions, program emphasis, populations served, geographic locations, and other important factors so that significant barriers and facilitators to success can be uncovered in a variety of school contexts. Applicants should describe their program, goals, and local context.

Demonstrated experience with continuous program improvement efforts: Schools should show some level of sophistication with program improvement efforts or demonstrate a strong desire to learn how to use the benchmarking tool. Applicants should describe their current improvement plans and the way they currently use relevant data.

Organizational support for the effort: Schools should have the capacity to

support a benchmarking effort, including the ability for key administrators to be involved in benchmarking training, planning efforts, the development of data collection instruments, and data collection. Staff as well as parents should also be willing to support data collection efforts. Applicants should supply statements from staff and parents indicating their support as well as their willingness to complete any necessary data collection instruments.

Willingness to write a reflection/case report after one year: Because factors that affect success will likely vary with school context, it is vital to learn each school director's viewpoint on the benchmarking process at the end of year one. Applicants should agree to write a year-end report indicating what was learned, barriers and facilitators they have encountered in the process, and any changes in practice that were adopted.

Phase II: Training of Staff in Benchmarking

Once schools are selected, staff must be trained. An expert should be brought in to provide state-of-the-art instruction on public sector benchmarking and how it can best be applied to charter schools.

Phase III: Development of Benchmarking System

To refine or elaborate upon the new system, a number of activities must occur, including the following:

- Focus groups should be conducted to gather more information from the people involved with specific domains.
- Participating schools should work together with the project manager to develop the benchmarking system, set time frames, and locate data sources.
- Baseline data should be collected at each participating school.
- Upon initial measurements, best practices should be sought out and benchmarking partnerships formed to facilitate learning.
- Once benchmarking partners and best practices are identified, the participating schools should develop plans to integrate the practices.

Deliverable: Final Report to ADE

Upon completion of the first year of implementation, a report should be written to ADE describing the process, barriers to and facilitators of success, each school's view of the process, a plan for ongoing support, and a strategy for implementing the process with another, larger cohort of schools.

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